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I. Tso Ssu 左思 and the "Songs of History"

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In his eight poems entitled *Yung-shih-shih* 詠史詩 or "Songs of History," the Western Chin poet Tso Ssu (ca. 300 A. D.) utilizes the figures of a number of historical personages to convey his own ideas and emotions. The title "song of history" had been employed by several earlier poets, beginning with Pan Ku 班固, the celebrated historian of the Latter Han. Tso Ssu, while borrowing the form of these earlier works, was not content merely to indulge in reflections upon the past, but infused his historical allusions with a strong personal flavor.

In the first and third poems, the poet boasts of his talents, both military and civil, and laments that the society of his day, dominated as it was by powerful aristocratic clans, allows no opportunity for a member of the poorer gentry like himself to advance. In the second and fourth poems, he speaks out in anger and hatred against the injustices of society, using bold and powerful images to convey his ideas. Nearly all the historical personages who appear in the poems are men who resemble Tso Ssu himself, men who came from the lower ranks of society and endured lives of poverty and hardship. Even Ching K'o 荆軻 in the sixth poem and Ssu-ma Hsiang-ju

司馬相如 in the seventh poem are cited as symbols of poverty and misfortune, though the former is most famous for his unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the ruler of the Ch'in dynasty, and the latter as a renowned court poet.

When Tso Ssu realized that his hopes and appeals were in vain, he could not help but fall into the despair reflected in the eighth poem. Abandoning his ambitions for advancement, the poet turned to Nature and sought fulfillment by merging himself with the processes of the natural world. This aspect of his thought is already hinted at in the fifth poem of the series, and is stated more explicitly in two separate poems entitled *Chao-yin* 招隱 or "Invitation to Hiding."

Tso Ssu's "Songs of History" exercised a considerable influence upon his successors of the Six Dynasties period, particularly Yüan Hung 袁宏, T'ao Yüan-ming 陶淵明, Yen Yen-chih 顏延之, and Pao Chao 鮑照. They adopted his device of using historical figures to convey their own sorrows and criticisms of society. Among these, Pao Chao, perhaps because his own life resembled that of Tso Ssu, seems to have been most deeply influenced.

II. On the Style of the *Sou-shen-chi* 搜神記

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As is well known, pure fiction developed in China rather late. In prose, the earliest real works of pure fiction are the *ch'uan-ch'i* 傳奇 or "tales of the marvelous" of the T'ang period. These T'ang tales were preceded by various collections of pseudo-historical or miraculous tales and anecdotes dating from Six Dynasties times, of which the most important is the *Sou-shen-chi* by Kan Pao 干寶 (4th cen. A. D.). In his work, the title of which may be translated as *Record of the Search for the Supernatural*, Kan Pao attempted to collect various examples of supernatural happenings which had appeared in history or which he himself had seen or heard of, to arrange them systematically, and to provide explanations for their occurrence. In other words, Kan Pao looked upon his collection not as a work of fiction, but as a record of actual happenings which, as he says in his introduction, may be used to supplement the

accounts of the historians. The fact that the bibliographic treatise of the *Sui History* classifies so many of these collections of wonder tales under the history section indicates that, in the eyes of the men of the time, they were looked upon as belonging in some sense to the category of historical writings.

But Kan Pao was also a historian in his own right, the author of a work called the *Chin-chi* 晉紀 or *Chin Chronicle*. A comparison of Kan Pao's style in the two works reveals important differences. While the *Chin-chi* is written in a uniformly simple and economical style, the style of the *Sou-shen-chi* is sometimes rambling and diffuse, sometimes drastically elliptical. It would appear that Kan Pao did not approach the writing of the latter work with the same seriousness that marked his attitude toward the writing of more orthodox history.

Pure fiction in China seems to have developed mainly through a process of increasing fictionalization of actual historical events or personages. In the case of Kan Pao, we may observe in the works of a single man the separation between sober history and pseudo-historical wonder tales, and the effect which this separation had upon the style of the writing.

III. Literary Groups of the Early Liang

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The literary history of the Six Dynasties period is marked by the appearance of distinct literary groups or cliques, and the conversion of literary composition into a social pastime. Without inquiring here which of these phenomena may be regarded as cause and which as result, the fact remains that most of the literary figures of the time cannot be considered apart from the particular groups to which they belonged, nor can their works be judged correctly in any other context. In surveying the literary history of the Ch'i and Liang dynasties, the author has become aware of a need for greater systematization in the treatment of the history of the literary groups of the period. As a beginning, the present study attempts to define the groups which were of importance in the early years of the Liang dynasty. The author has discussed the literary group of the

central court, which centered about the figures of Kao-tsu 高祖, the founder of the dynasty, and Crown Prince Chao-ming 昭明太子, as well as the provincial groups centering around Kao-tsu's sons, Kang, the Prince of Chin-an 晉安王綱, and Yi, the Prince of Hsiang-tung 湘東王繹; and his younger brothers Hsiu, the Prince of An-ch'eng 安成王秀, and Wei, the Prince of Nan-p'ing 南平王偉. With an understanding of these various literary groups and the roles they played, the development of the literature of the early years of the Liang can be correctly traced.

IV. *Yüeh-fu* 樂府 of the Middle T'ang Poets

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During the thirty-five years from 785 to 820, which correspond to the eras *chen-yüan* 貞元, *yung-chen* 永貞, and *yüan-ho* 元和 of the Middle T'ang, many poets wrote works in the *yüeh-fu* form. Of these, eight may be singled out for the excellence of their works in this form. Li Ho 李賀, whose works enjoyed popularity at court, utilized themes from the earlier *yüeh-fu* of Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties times and wrote in a romantic style. Li Yi 李益, who had had military experience himself, specialized in martial themes. Po Chü-yi 白居易 and his friend Yüan Chen 元稹 composed works on the same themes, producing collections known respectively as the *Hsin-yüeh-fu* 新樂府 and *Ku-t'i-yüeh-fu* 古題樂府. Liu Tsung-yüan 柳宗元 wrote songs in praise of the founders of the T'ang, entitled *T'ang nao-ko-ku-ch'ui-ch'ü* 唐鐃歌鼓吹曲, which he hoped would gain popularity among the military. Han Yü 韓愈 wrote ten *ch'in-ts'ao* 琴操 or "Lute Pieces" to replace a body of older lute pieces that had been lost over the centuries; his works remained popular until recent times. Chang Chi 張籍 and Wang Chien 王建 wrote works dealing with themes from everyday life. But unlike other poets such as Po Chü-yi, their intent was not to express social criticism so much as to portray in detail the lives of the common people.

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